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*The Moderator Who
 Began to Preach
 at a Fur Post*

By AUGUSTUS BRIDLE

OLD St Ann is a battle prayer—large, tempo of the Dead March in Saul, Scotch, dour, compacted of centuries of slow-going and premirthless Sabbaths; sung best with a predestinating drone and a thump in every other beat of the bar. And to one who knows not the age-long litany of the prairie, St. Ann may seem to be the father of unforgiving melodies that unite a people.

But there is an older plain-song than St. Ann, and you hear it still as it used to be of old in the tabernacle of warriors; this very month, the moon of leaves, here and yonder wherever the assemblies of the Cree men gather on the campus betwixt the hills. It is the Thirst Dance, banged out by the deer-skin tomtoms, wailed out by the congregation of tomtommers and the squaws, unceasingly six days and six nights from sundown until the sixth one following; the terrible sostenuto of the pagan invoking also the aid of the God of battles but in a wordless nasalizing "Na—a—ah."

Maybe these are as different as round the world; one the melodic prayer of the sin-fighting kirkman; the other the equally melodic invocation of the scalp-taking red man that used to be, and not so long ago, on the prairies. But if one should add to these the \$20,000 pipe organ, the gowned choir and the soft seats of the elect who ride to the kirk in the limousines, he might get some way of estimating the life and character of the Rev. Andrew Baird, the new Moderator of the Presbyterian Assembly in Canada.

I am drawn into this fanciful conglomeration of images because I have never even seen the Rev. Dr. Baird and because some years ago he was to me a peculiarly speculative personality. To recall when and how that personal interest began and grew is to go back what seems like delving into a past age to locate this learned Moderator in the spot where he first came to light as a preacher of righteousness. And when I first knew intimately, as one smells the fragrance of a Cree tepee in the smoke, that old square-built, clapboarded Presbyterian kirk on a headland of the north Saskatchewan, it was to hear people talk of Rev. Andrew Baird, the man who seems to have consecrated that stronghold of faith to the cause of religion in a rather pagan world. I am not sure that Baird was the very first pastor of that old church which has now gone into its third phase of development—but I think he was. And he was always looked back to as the beginner of the congregation as it was the first year of this century.

It happened that Rev. D. G. McQueen was, after 1887, the pastor of the old Edmonton kirk. And but a few years ago he also was Moderator. So this

four-square tabernacle of wood whose shingle-nails cost twenty-five cents a pound has given two rulers to the united brethren. In 1901 men and women at the furpost town still talked of Baird's scholarly and finished discourses even while they heard but yesterday the stern sermons of McQueen. And when one began to inquire into the work of this pioneering Ph.D. with his post-graduate courses in Leipsic and Edinburgh, it began to leak out that he was more than a preacher.

Be it remembered that Andrew Baird was the first editorial writer on the Edmonton Bulletin, which was the first newspaper ever printed west or north of Winnipeg and this side of the Selkirks. Looking back over the only extant complete fyle of the Bulletin from 1881 until 1899, I stumbled across a series of amazingly smooth and able leaders, many of them more than a column in length. I am not sure that any of these appeared in the first issues of the Bulletin, and if so they must have been short columns, for the Bulletin in its early form was a four-pager, no bigger than the Philistine, yet big enough to get a notice from the great London Times.

Of all the editorials in those early Bulletins the one I best remember was one on The Cayuse. As a piece of intimate historical writing chockful of unbogged humanism, that article was a masterpiece. Without the least tinge of vernacular or even suggesting that the Indian pony was able to "live on one blade of grass and a single drop of dew," the writer unfolded the life story of the marvelous cayuse. Poetry, history and economics were combined in that essay with simple human feeling. The piece was such a classic that I asked who had written it—knowing very well that in those days at least it could not have been Frank Oliver, the Bulletin proprietor. I learned that it was the pastor of the Presbyterian church who taught Oliver the best he knew about the King's English in those days. Judging by some of Hon. Frank's speeches of recent years in Parliament I should say that Mr. Baird is entitled to some credit.

NO doubt Baird and Oliver were fast friends. In the '80's a man made friends at a furpost or in a cow-town where nowadays he makes only competitors. But there was no competitor to Baird, who was the only Presbyterian preacher for 200 miles in any direction; and none to Oliver, who was the only newspaper proprietor in about the same territory. Between these two men the morality and enlightenment of the furpost community was pretty well looked after. The pulpit and the press. And what a pulpit! Facing the river gorge, with a little choir stall and a dinky reed organ behind; looking fair down at a huge box stove that burned slabs from the saw-mill down on the flats; looking fair into the faces of a pied and motley congregation of old-timers, new-comers and half-breeds of French and Scotch extraction, this preacher of the '80's could listen to the singing of old St. Ann with a great uplift in his soul. The place smelled of deerskin moccasins and camp smoke. There were half-breed women with white husbands and black-haired, camp-like children. On the way home Cree, French and English were spoken on the foot-paths among the little poplars where the jack-rabbits leaped across the main street and the bells of picketed Indian cayuses drifted dreamily through the sanctified Sabbath air.

Nowhere could one get grander Scotch Sabbaths than seemed to emanate from that little square church on the head-land. There was no other church but the Methodist, over on another jut, and the Catholic church, further up the gorge. All humanity then was comprised in these three congregations. The English church came later; followed by the Baptist and a few others. They have them all now.

But in 1881 there was church union in Edmonton and still more on the trails where the sturdy, slow-set figure of Rev. Baird went cayusing and buckboarding among the natives and the sparse settlers.

Remember—that until five years after Rev. Baird left the Edmonton church to become a recluse in Manitoba College, there was no railway nearer Edmonton than the C. P. R. at Calgary, 200 miles south. Baird was pastor in a town that had more log shacks than any other kind of house; the town that seemed to grow out of that old palisaded fort down on the flats—where, in 1885, two years before Baird left, the population of Edmonton crowded together to escape from fear of scalping Indians. The road to Edmonton was first from Winnipeg via the Red River carts route, 1,000 miles. After the C. P. R. got to Calgary, in 1884, or thereabouts, the nearest depot was Calgary. Edmonton still was left aloof. If Rev. Baird wanted to see a brother preacher of the same creed as his own he drove his buckboard to Calgary, stopping off at the posts between, on and on 200 miles and more out of the poplared, spruce-grown land into the sweeps of the baldheaded hills.

AND almost anywhere along that trail the preacher could see the camp smokes of the red men. Any day in June, almost, he could detour a mile or so from the trail, and forgetting old St. Ann and the Westminster Confession of Faith find himself in a congregation of thirst-dancers, with that older than St. Ann melody thumping and wailing its message into the souls of the dancers and the young braves undergoing torture. He could drive his ponies or his foot-hills broncho "busted" at some corral in among a horde of cayuses, among braves bedecked for the chase or the war trail—though war was becoming a lost art; among yelping Cree dogs and poetic, frowsy, smoke-curling skin lodges dotted along the snake of the river or the creek among the thick poplars; among podgy, grinning women, who sat at the flaps of their skin lodges pounding moose meat for bags of pemmican—and many a time he has eaten it.

Such was the inspiring and native colour of the background to the first pastorate of Rev. Andrew Baird. In front of his pulpit he had all the land lying south towards Calgary; to his right the trails that led up into the foot-hills and the upper Rockies, now a tourists' paradise; to his left the sublime sweeps of the great Saskatchewan, that began in a glacier and ended in the tumble of Grand Rapids into Lake Winnipeg, more than a thousand miles below; and behind him, silenter, vaster and more mysterious than all, he had the unbroken North, tenanted only by half-breeds, Indians, fur-packers, and huskie dogs. He was midway of it all. He was a man to be envied. Every day he went forth to his labours or sat in his study among his scholarly books to think out a sermon he had a new vision of living.

But in 1887 he left it all to become a pedagogue and a recluse in Manitoba College, at Winnipeg. Was he sick of the isolation? I don't know. But it would be safe presumption that he was only a short while in college halls till he began to have a heartache for old furpost Edmonton. To most of us up in that land he was as good as buried in Winnipeg. And it comes like a resurrection of some sort to think of this man as Moderator of an Assembly of 500 delegates, reverend and lay, from all parts of Canada. It seems like a wilful perversion of an almost prehistoric life that ended in 1887 to think of this man, pried away from the seclusion of his house and garden out at the College, away from his philosophy and his logic and his memory of a grand old epical day, to preside at a Congress where 408 delegates vote for the resolution in favour of church union with Methodists and Congregationalists, and